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ABSTRACT

Companies have high expectations of the 440 colleges of further education, which will be the largest source of the skilled middle-range staff on whom industrial efficiency and innovation depend. Colleges look to employers to play four distinct roles--as customers, as places of learning, as advisors, and as joint planners in the regional or local economy. The strategic role of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in the partnership is to speak for companies taken together as a regional sector and to suggest the pattern and demands of jobs likely to be available to college-qualified people. Research points to four distinct objectives for improved and better defined college/employer interaction: to draw a wide range of employed people into continuing education and training; to continue developing a high-quality "applied" mode of education; to guide students towards those choices of study and ways of learning most likely to be of use to them and the economy; and to help the colleges adopt a marketing approach that creates a demand for learning. To undertake their interactive mission, the colleges must extend the scope and develop methods of "applied" education, upgrade marketing, and support staff in interacting with the working world. Employers must be willing to help employees undertake college learning and understand the role of workplaces and activities as the context and material of applied education. TECs must act as brokers between colleges and companies. (YLB)

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ED 397 244

THE COUNCIL FOR INDUSTRY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

COLLEGES AND COMPANIES

SHARING GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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THE COUNCIL'S PURPOSE

The Council for Industry and Higher Education is an independent body of heads of companies, universities and Colleges, established in 1986. Its aim is to encourage industry and higher education to work together and represent joint thinking to government.

UK industry needs to be part of a more highly and broadly educated nation at every level. Its future success depends on responding creatively to continually more sophisticated surroundings, not only in building its workforces but also in identifying markets, developing its products, structuring its own organisations, training its people, and defining its responsibilities to the community at large.

The remarkable role and resources of the local Colleges need to be better appreciated by society at large and by employers in particular. They expect much of the Colleges, namely

- to answer to the education needs of all in their community, individuals and employers, and especially to late starters and those otherwise at a disadvantage;

- to develop alternatives to present post–16 education which give as much weight to the vocational as to the academic, to the practical as to the theoretical, and to the applied as to the pure;

- to share with employers the responsibility for encouraging people to develop and learn, (and where possible to teach), at every stage of their careers and lives.

The Council believes those aims can be fulfilled only through a constructive dialogue, locally and nationally between employers and Colleges. They need to develop shared expectations that are well thought out and a sense of shared responsibility for helping people to learn and grow throughout their lives. This paper, which follows "Changing Colleges: Further Education in the Market Place" (1993), suggests what those shared expectations might most usefully be. To do that it draws on research by the Institute for Employment Studies on how College/employer relations stand today, what sorts of interaction seem fruitful for the future and what may help or hinder it.

In preparing this paper the Council has relied on "Developing Responsiveness: College/Employer Interaction" by Sue Rawlinson, Helen Connor and the research team at the Institute for Employment Studies.

The Council has also benefited greatly from the thinking of:

Roger Allen (North London Training and Enterprise Council), Mike Austin (Accrington & Rossendale College), Martin Camillin (Department for Education and Employment), Geoff Daniels (Further Education Funding Council), Rachel Jefferson (Further Education Funding Council), Sharon King (Further Education Funding Council), Tony Mills (British Nuclear Fuels plc), Stuart Nicholls (Further Education Funding Council), Michael Stock (Further Education Funding Council), Pat Taylor (West Kent College), and Tony Webb (Confederation of British Industry).

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SUMMARY

Companies of all sizes are coming to have high expectations of the 440 Colleges (of Further Education), which will be the largest source of the skilled middle–range staff on whom industrial efficiency and innovation depend. They educate more than 3m students. The UK relies on Colleges to develop a broadly based but employment–related style of education, neither "academic" nor "vocational" in the usual sense, which can widen students' choices and help them adapt to change.

Both Colleges and employers need to think out consciously the relations that there ought to be between them, and to develop those relations systematically. Government and funding bodies will want to review their policies to encourage that. Research by the Institute for Employment Studies into the state of "College/employer interaction" reports a *"hum of dialogue and joint activity between staff of Colleges and employer companies"*, and many beneficial outcomes.

The "interactive" mission for a College, as the Council sees it, is to take the initiative systematically in making available to as many clients as possible, not least the employed, education reflecting on, often growing out of, their actual or future potential working world.

In pursuit of that aim our research points to *four distinct objectives* for improved, and better defined, College/employer relations. They are these:

to draw a wide range of employed people, among others, into continuing education and training;

to continue developing a high–quality "applied" mode of education, neither academic nor vocational in quite the traditional sense;

to guide students towards those choices of study and those ways of learning most likely to be of use to them and the economy; and

to help the Colleges adopt a challenging, as against a merely "responsive", marketing approach so as to *create* a demand for learning from the employing communities they are part of.

The "interactive" mission for a College, as the Council sees it, is to take the initiative systematically in making available to as many clients as possible, not least the employed, education reflecting on, often growing out of, their actual or future potential working world. For Colleges to embrace that mission realistically decisions to be taken may need to include the following:

By Colleges:

to make it their mission to extend the scope and develop methods of "applied" education;

to upgrade their marketing thinking and effort;

to "challenge" their community of potential clients and employers;

to manage all their relations with employers as part of a single College strategy;

to support their staff in exploring, researching and interacting personally with the working world which is to be the part–context for their teaching;

to find resources for the systematic development of work placements and other "real life" learning contexts; and

to discuss with TECs, and other agencies, how to develop their own understanding of future working opportunities – in particular the analysis of labour market information and student destinations.

By employers:

to be willing to consider helping employees to undertake College learning (perhaps on employers' premises);

to understand the fundamental role workplaces and their activities have to play as the context and material of "applied" education and so be willing to offer all the learning opportunities they can; and

to consider nationally and regionally how the properly growing demand for placements and live project work can be met.

By TECs:

to discuss Colleges' marketing thinking in terms of TECs' knowledge of local employment prospects, and the demands on employees the future working world is likely to make;

to help by acting as "brokers" between Colleges and companies; and

to separate this whole important strategic effort from the day–to–day complications of initiatives/schemes etc.

Thoughtful Colleges are already moving along the paths suggested. Most Colleges, however, can be expected to redefine their purposes only if national policies and funding arrangements steer them that way and reinforce their

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decisions.

The means of steering policy are to hand. Colleges are financed according to criteria which can embody incentives to reflect national priorities. Funds are offered to Colleges in the context of the strategic plans they draw up to national specifications and agree with TECs. The official funding bodies control that machinery within a framework of guidance given by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. All those sources of influence are amply able to express the policy emphases we have proposed.

The merging of the Department of Employment with the Department for Education should do more than symbolise employer/education interaction. It provides the cue for refining the missions of the Training and Enterprise Councils. It should make it easier to ensure that the scheme–rules for government programmes – Youth Training and Training for Work for example – promote rather than hinder fruitful College/employer interaction. With those matters settled TECs will find it easier to contribute constructively to the Colleges' strategic–planning effort. All those concerned need to be of a common mind.

It will be for the Council with other employer organisations to work to spread understanding about the nature of "applied" education and its lifetime–learner clients. There is scope for a national investigation about how employers can increase the opportunities (via placements and projects of all sorts) for students to use the workplace as the raw material of their learning.

1. HIGH EXPECTATIONS

1.1 Companies of all sizes, the Council for Industry and Higher Education has said, need to have high and intelligent expectations of the 440 local Colleges (of Further Education). To help to animate the dialogue between employers and Colleges the Council has sought clarity about what expectations Colleges and employers ought to have of each other and what policies are needed to realise them. This paper outlines our conclusions.

1.2 The Colleges are less well known than universities and have a role less widely understood than that of schools. It is, however, on the Colleges that the UK now relies to be the largest source of the skilled middle-range staff on which industrial efficiency and improvement depend.

1.3 It relies on the Colleges too to develop a broadly based but employment-related style of education which can widen the choices of students and help them become adaptable to change. The Colleges, being dispersed countrywide, must also be leaders in making a reality of life-long learning.

1.4 The Colleges will do all this on a very large scale. They already cater for about 3m students and are set to grow. More young and older people will seek learning with an applied and practical bias, embedded in the realities of their local economies. More will study from home or work or both.

1.5 For Colleges to play these big roles all their relations with employers will need to be seen together, as central rather than marginal to the work they do. Employers need strong encouragement to release staff for the education they need and to contribute to its cost in time and money. Moreover, the workplace itself, its activities, techniques and decisions, need to be put on offer by industry as objects for students' study and reflection. The core of modern applied learning is for people to *learn to reflect systematically in a broad context of knowledge on the work they have in hand.*

1.6 To meet those challenges demands a more explicit understanding of the relations to be worked for between Colleges and employers. Both sides need to think them out consciously and develop them systematically. The government and funding bodies will want to review their policies to encourage that.

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2. STATE OF THE PARTNERSHIP: A REPORT

2.1 The Council, jointly with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the Department for Education and Employment, has commissioned an investigation from the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) on the state of the present partnership between Colleges and employers. It helps us understand what will in future help or hinder maximum "fruitful interaction" – essentially a two-way business.

2.2 This paper summarises the outcome of IES's work and draws from it strategic implications for future policy-making by Colleges, employers, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), official funding-bodies and government.

2.3 Rather than collect bare statistics by survey, the Institute has canvassed information by interview and discussion to build up an understanding of present practice among Colleges and employers and of the motives and energies underlying it. Researchers have held discussions with about a hundred staff and twenty groups of students in nineteen Colleges, as well as seventy-five employers of all sizes and representatives of five TECs. The participants were clustered in six regions of the UK, chosen as having contrasting economic and social characters.

2.4 IES reports an encouraging hum of dialogue and joint activity between staff of Colleges and employing companies. Many departments in all Colleges visited are in webs of varied activities with a wide range of employers. Dialogue is already a habit. A large College may have connections, though not all of great intensity, with several thousand companies of all sizes. The College sector as a whole has a connection with small and medium enterprises that looks unrivalled. *"There is a great deal of College/employer interaction in all areas"*, IES reports, *"and clearly many beneficial outcomes."*

2.5 To build on those foundations, however, both employers and academics will need to understand more clearly the underlying reasons for what they try to do together. Sharing experience could make disparate methods mutually reinforcing. Gaps can be filled and good practice imitated if the intensity, quality and usefulness of relationships is assessed and managed overall. Those will be among the ways to give the interaction of employment with College education the priority we think it needs.

2.6 Colleges look to employers to play four distinct roles: as customers, as places of learning (primarily through a range of placements), as advisers and as joint planners in the regional or local economy. Employers may

- commission from Colleges education or training for their staff;

- offer the workplace and its activities as the context for students' learning (work-experience, work-shadowing, projects and exercises);

- advise Colleges or individual departments, through boards and committees or informally; and/or

- join Colleges (and other bodies including TECs, Business Links and school/industry partnerships) in local co-ordination of responsibilities.

2.7 Our researchers have used those four roles as categories into which they have analyzed the very varied employer/College relations they found.

3. EMPLOYERS AS CUSTOMERS

3.1 Many companies have until recently "released" staff, usually apprentices or trainees, to attend College once a week to add a dimension of classroom education to their training programme at work. Most of Colleges' longstanding connections with employers have grown from that "day-release" tradition. Those connections have often been the main or only channels by which teaching staff keep abreast of current industrial realities.

3.2 As companies have abandoned apprenticeships, ceased to train for lifetime employment and cut back recruitment of young people, they send many fewer young people to College once a week. Colleges visited by IES report a fast-diminishing flow of such students from engineering (which accounts for the largest share of employer-based students) and almost none at all now from construction; increasing numbers come from more fashionable sectors like commerce, finance and health-care. Few Colleges have undertaken the research that might help them predict the future level of such work as the population of young people increases again and as major industrial sectors, like construction, recover.

3.3 "Day-release" students have traditionally attended classes specified and planned as part of Colleges' standard programme. The work is often part of the general training of craftsmen, so that recruits from several or many employers follow College-planned and timetabled courses in the same classroom. But this relatively mass-produced education and training is beginning to give place to something tailor-made to individual company wishes. To rebuild the numbers of part-time students, Colleges now strive to respond to employers' *particular* orders for *special* courses, run

exclusively for their own staff. Such employer–led work must be designed to a company specification and often taught on company premises. Teaching must often be offered intensively to upskill part of an employer's workforce in a period of weeks or months.

Such bespoke learning reflects a desirable part–shift in influence from "producer" (College) to "customer" (employer). Inevitably, however, the new work for employers sits uneasily with the relative rigidities and daily timetable which have traditionally made for efficiency in regular College arrangements. Employers are reported to be often slow in foreseeing their own needs and to expect rapid responses from Colleges, which in turn, are keen to please. To meet employer requests and to appear "responsive", College managements can be obliged to re–allocate teachers, energy, management effort, space and equipment at the expense of the staple work of the College.

Tailor–made courses for employers have not so far penetrated beyond the margins of College work, but there are already signs of strain. Typical College organisation is still designed essentially for older purposes. The new work is often felt within Colleges to carry a special prestige; it attracts fees supposed at least to cover its cost. The relative glamour of "consultancy" can seem to contrast with the continuing ordinariness of the everyday College timetable. Diversion of resources to employer–led work, IES says, causes *"some disquiet in some Colleges, as the relatively small revenue generated [is] seen by staff who [are] not involved in it as disproportionate to the resources devoted to it"*.

There are signs of corresponding energy–loss to Colleges' regular work. Day–release was regarded as a *"declining area"*, *"not worth developing"*, tending to be *"less well resourced"*, spread across several departments' programmes, so that achievements were difficult to measure. Employers are not yet voicing general dissatisfaction with the day–release work but IES has already heard *"some criticisms of relevance and quality, and even more about poor communication and feedback about trainees' progress."* That *"lack of attention to employers as 'customers' in this area and of quality management on some ... courses contrasted markedly to that for customised work and consultancy, and contributed to giving some Colleges in our sample a poor image with employers."*

The strains are set to intensify as Colleges and employers persuade each other (as they must) to embark on longer–run and large–scale education and personal development of workforces. That huge market, we understand, could respond quickly to the cheapness of teaching that can be offered to companies with a sensible element of public subsidy.

In recent years many industrial managements have recognised

similar strains in their own businesses as they have tried to explore new markets with organisations designed, and staff trained, to cater to traditional ones. To release energy for innovation becomes essential but means big choices of priorities. Those choices make debates about "mission statements" very far from formalities. Colleges may find that the constraints of timetables and systems designed for "standard mass-production" conflict quite sharply with the freedom they need to cater for the students and their employers, who are now beginning to present themselves.

3.9 Colleges have a tradition of debate about the "flexible College" (a term of art within the sector) organised to be accessible to people with various needs and conflicting demands on time. That debate now has a sharp edge. It has parallels in industry's conversion to "flexible manufacturing". The task for College governors, many of whom now are themselves business people, is to urge the institutions towards clarity of purpose. For that, we learn from the research, Colleges will need to understand their local employers much more closely. Government and funding bodies too will need to make national expectations clear and to emphasise them in funding criteria.

4. COMPANIES AS A CONTEXT FOR LEARNING

4.1 Students, College lecturers and employers are found to share the strong conviction that students not yet employed learn much of great value from first-hand experience of workplaces during their courses. Such students believe their placements help them to choose a career, to learn to "communicate", "solve problems" and work with others ("especially adults", they say!). Those aiming for higher education say that the experience helps them with entrance interviews; others believe it aids their job-seeking.

4.2 College staff and employers nearly all agree with them and are already arranging for more of the students (particularly the younger ones) to take placements. The new General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), directed towards chosen "occupational areas", make for better education when experience of work is included, though it is not (yet) compulsory. Traditional A-level students too get a broader grounding by seeing something of work alongside their academic programmes.

4.3 Companies claim that *"their company profile and image [improve] as a consequence of this kind of community activity"*. (One small company is reported as saying that it is *"much better than advertising"*.) College staff believe that the contact made with companies keeps them up-to-date with industry's thinking and with the job prospects in their own vocational area.

4.4 Nonetheless we do not doubt our researchers' conviction that employers and teachers devote energy and time to students' work experience, work-shadowing, project activities and the rest, beyond any returns they themselves or their organisations directly can expect from it. This is an area where many employers display a largely altruistic sympathy with teachers' professional concern for students. The last fifteen years' drive for education/business partnership has certainly helped.

4.5 The enthusiasm of individual teachers, however, has yet to be matched in the Colleges by clear commitment from those who manage them, make College policy, set priorities and allocate staff-time and resources. Students learn best from work-placements when well-matched to the opportunities an employer can offer; good results reflect painstaking planning and preparation. IES nonetheless tells us that most College managements have yet to make any formal provision for managing "work experience" properly. *"Very few [staff] had a time allowance for this work but, if they did, the caseload was viewed as being too large. Administrative support was considered inadequate in almost all Colleges. Examples included operating out of shared staffrooms with limited access to telephones to make arrangements, no one to take calls while [staff] were teaching, and problems in getting documents typed and copied."*

4.6 The demand for placements and projects from employers shows signs of outrunning the present supply. Demand ought to increase as lecturers on occupationally related courses come to see work activities as part of the essential subject-matter of teaching. Employers, invited to do more, may quickly begin to see Colleges as unprofessional in relying as heavily as now on staff goodwill and extra-curricular effort.

4.7 The research speaks highly of students' workplace experience and of the powerful goodwill surrounding it. There is a sense of partnership and community feeling. Nonetheless there are clear signs that College managements, here too, face big choices about the nature of the learning they offer. Are the activities of work an *essential* component of the "materials" for study and so central to programme-planning and the work of College staff? Or are they to remain useful but marginal?

5. GIVING ADVICE

5.1 Since becoming independent corporations Colleges are obliged to draw the majority of their governors from the business community. Employer governors are reported in the research to be *"seen as important to the College as a whole in particular their professional skills and expertise as business managers"* and are *"valued*

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in providing support to the management and development of the Colleges". Few of them have fostered specific new initiatives with employers but some are able to stimulate interaction more generally through their participation in College strategic planning, by encouraging the College to take up new initiatives, or in working groups and curricular development.

5.2 Some Colleges, through their own marketing staff, conduct surveys of employers to assess their needs and determine how satisfied employers are with the Colleges' work. Only a few Colleges have so far used such surveys to inform their own strategic planning but many more intend to.

5.3 One College in particular is reported to have undertaken a large survey through personal visits to over two hundred and fifty employers. That has generated "a wealth of information" which is being used to develop a marketing strategy and (unusually) is being shared across the College. That College is now planning a follow-up, revisiting all the employers which had previously participated in the survey. That encouraging level of survey activity, however, (IES says) is still the exception rather than the rule.

5.4 The researchers report that every College they visited has, or has had, employer groups supposed to advise on what students should learn, usually as part of their vocational courses. But the groups are an effective channel for good employer-influence only when their scope and limits are properly set, when they are given clear objectives and are well managed.

5.5 Our own experience of the university sector has long shown that academic/employer relations may actually suffer from meetings with vague agenda, sprawling paper-work or prolonged technical discussion to which business people find it hard to contribute. IES finds that some Colleges - no doubt among the leaders - are already re-formulating employer/College advisory work around "task groups", focusing more narrowly on precise objectives.

5.6 Employers are often criticised by Colleges for their lack of understanding of education and training and of how Colleges' freedom of action is limited by the demands of qualifications/awarding bodies. It is also felt that employers have too high an expectation of their own influence on the curriculum. Employers, on the other hand, complained about the constant changes in education and training. There is plainly need for better mutual understanding to encourage greater co-operation.

5.7 *"There was seen to be some value in these sorts of advisory activities,"* IES concludes, *"but they varied in their effectiveness and there was little evaluation of what they achieved."*

5.8 The Council hopes that this advisory employer/College dialogue can move beyond its present fairly rudimentary stage as its true purposes and agenda are better spelt out. It is not for employers to become amateur educationists or designers of curricula but to describe, as best they can, the future character of work and its demands on people. Educators cannot look to employers for precise specifications of "the sort of people they need" but should ask instead for suggestions on how students can be encouraged to learn through life and reflect thoughtfully on the work they do. Both sides can compare experience on how to manage change.

6. CO-ORDINATING REGIONAL AND LOCAL STRATEGIES

6.1 The Council had hoped to learn that Colleges were now invited to play a major role in coherent local and regional strategies for improving individuals' education levels and promoting progress towards a world-class workforce. Despite the National Education and Training Targets that is not what IES finds.

6.2 Experience varies widely from College to College and from TEC to TEC but on the whole this area of activity is found to be complex, fragmented and in a state of flux.

6.3 IES has summarised for us:

6.3.1 *Local and regional activities for most Colleges were no more than a very small component of the spread of interactions with employers.*

6.3.2 *The few large and/or active employers taking part were unrepresentative of local business generally. Regional activity seldom affected the mainstream of College life.*

6.3.3 *Most TECs did not feel that the Colleges were "key players" in their [the TECs'] priority activities such as Investors in People, training for the unemployed or work-placements for schools. They often failed to realise the size and scope of Colleges' work in the locality and its growing impact on TEC activities.*

6.3.4 *The activities often included meetings or workshops, sometimes without clearly focused objectives. In many cases, the lack of any tangible benefits to Colleges or employers did not encourage involvement ... national priorities and initiatives [were seen to conflict with local or regional needs].*

6.3.5 IES describes *a complex web of local groups, meetings and events, whose functions were often unclear and overlapping. In particular, the functions and roles of the TECs and others in relation to eg strategic planning for education and training, stimulating and*

meeting employers' needs, economic regeneration, were often unclear to Colleges and employers and had led to confusion and fragmentation.

7. TECs AND COLLEGES

7.1 As the Colleges come to understand more clearly the part they and employers should play in each others' affairs, we hope the TECs will reflect on the contribution they themselves ought to make to that partnership. The TECs' strategic role here is not that of competing or contracting with Colleges with scheme–funds from government budgets. They are needed primarily to speak for companies taken together as a regional sector and, secondly, to suggest the pattern and demands of jobs likely to be on offer in the longer and shorter term to College–qualified people (Labour Market Information). Those are the vital ingredients TECs can bring to the discussion of Colleges' strategic plans. The TECs may also help with introductions.

7.2 The tasks of local strategic planning, of introducing smaller employers, and understanding the job prospects in the local economy are easily crowded out by a succession of "initiatives" local and national. TECs feel bound to devote an amount of energy to such initiatives which employers and Colleges feel to be disproportionate.

7.3 As local industry spokesmen with an overview of employment prospects, TECs have been given the legal obligation to "approve" Colleges' strategic plans. The Colleges, jealous no doubt of their new independence, feel discouraged from discussing their planning with the TECs which are seen to have been given an unjustifiably superior role. *"The most common model"*, IES says, *"is for Colleges to draw up their plans and present them [to TECs] as a fait accompli. The TECs saw a need to have a more formative collaborative process but the Colleges were on the whole less enthusiastic"*, but *"a few Colleges had drawn up their strategic plans with advice from employers and had found this helpful"*.

7.4 TECs also fulfil a second obligation to offer *"local labour market information" to Colleges to inform strategic planning. "However"*, IES says, *"such information is considered by most Colleges and some TECs not to be detailed enough to be useful and it [needs] to be improved"*. Many College staff never see it and few of those who do find it useful.

7.5 The TECs and their functions are outside the Council's own main field of knowledge but the research shows that both TECs and Colleges seek a much clearer understanding of what they should expect of each other. The present vagueness wastes opportunities

and scarce energies and at worst generates unproductive ill–will.

7.5.1 *Considering the overall scale of interaction with local employers it was surprising that the TECs did not have more involvement with Colleges ... . TECs usually provided small–scale funding and some surveys of employers' needs but Colleges had generated most of their own new employer–led work and work placements without help from the TECs. TECs had approved Colleges' strategic plans but there had been very little interaction involved in the process. SFCs had very little interaction with TECs at all.*

7.5.2 *The multiple role that TECs could have, being a partner in the development of a joint activity, directly advising on College planning, [being] the quality manager or funder of some employer–led work and taking the lead in economic regeneration, was often a source of confusion and difficulty for both parties. Colleges were generally unsure about the role they themselves should play in the economic development of their area or region.*

7.5.3 *On the whole, there was a lack of awareness among TEC education staff about the extent of employer/College interaction and the growing importance of FE Colleges as suppliers of vocational training to employers in their localities. They held the traditional view of Colleges as mainly low–level education providers to 16–19 year–olds. Most Colleges and many employers saw TECs as relatively recent arrivals adding an additional layer of bureaucracy to College/employer relations which were established before [TECs] existed.*

Some implications for policy

8. NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

8.1 The overarching aim for Colleges is to encourage many more people into an education that is usefully related to the working world. The evident energy, enthusiasm and goodwill between Colleges and employers are resources to be harnessed. In pursuit of that aim our research points to *four distinct objectives* for improved, and better defined, College/employer interaction. They are these:

8.1.1 **to draw a wide range of employed people, among others, into continuing education and training;**

8.1.2 **to continue developing a high-quality "applied" mode of education, neither academic nor vocational in quite the traditional sense;**

8.1.3 **to guide students towards those choices of study and those ways of learning most likely to be of use to them and the economy; and**

8.1.4 **to help the Colleges adopt a challenging, as against a merely "responsive", marketing approach so as to *create* a demand for learning from the employing communities they are part of.**

8.2 The rest of this paper discusses the implications of each of those objectives for the collaborative effort of Colleges with employers and proposes policies to encourage it.

9. WIDENING THE LEARNING MARKET

To draw a wide range of employed people, among others, into continuing education and training.

9.1 IES tells us that most Colleges have yet to discover what should replace their declining day-release work with employed students. Limited innovative thinking is reported on how Colleges can make learning a practical opportunity for employees from companies of all sizes and at many different stages of their working lives. To offer short courses in response to employer commissions is at best a very partial answer to the challenge of "creating a learning society". Those short courses in any case are already found to compete awkwardly for resources with Colleges' other work as both are at present organised. Most Colleges have been responders rather than

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initiative–takers in mounting them.

9.2 The challenge and the market opportunity for Colleges are much broader than those of offering either standardised courses once a week to apprentices or short bursts of training bespoke by employers. Rather they are to persuade both employers and employees to bargain together on how employees are to have the chance continuously through working life to develop their minds and skills. A culture–change is the aim.

9.3 Colleges and employers can encourage each other to accept a shared interest and responsibility: that of helping employees perceive themselves as continuing learners whether in College or at work. They will often be pursuing qualifications but always gaining the habit of systematic reflection on their working activity and using their work as the context of formal learning.

9.4 We hope Colleges will see that **the first purpose of interaction is to secure employer commitment to employees' learning and to work out how employee and education can be made conveniently available to each other. That is a purpose at the level of College "mission".**

9.5 The question of mutual availability will, we expect, make urgent the discussion on how to reorganise the College timetable, the scope to divide study into shorter discrete units rather than prescribed courses, the use of open and distance learning, the employment of lecturers on employers premises and so on. Thinking within the sector has already developed around the idea of the "flexible College". That idea could begin to come into its own.

9.6 Rethinking the teaching and learning processes must be the context for a study of how information technology can be brought into play. It is important so far as possible to use electronic aids to free lecturers for their proper and distinctively human activity of encouraging, advising, checking, criticising, praising and assessing progress of their students. That personal attention is probably inseparable from building the confidence that will enable people to turn their knowledge to account in unfamiliar and changing circumstances at work.

10. "APPLIED" EDUCATION

To continue developing a high–quality "applied" mode of education, neither academic nor vocational in quite the traditional sense.

10.1 "Vocational" education has traditionally been criticised, and so attracted low esteem, for narrowing students' horizons and limiting their prospects; academic education on the other hand has been too

theoretical (and often seemed irrelevant) for most people. We see the Colleges, and not least the Sixth–form Colleges, taking a lead in developing the newer mode of education for which the Council for Industry and Higher Education has used the word "applied". The best forms of GNVQs are beginning to represent that.

10.2 *"The overall variety of educational opportunities"*, the Council has said, *"needs to be as wide as possible. To achieve that means enlarging the range in favour of broad education which is rooted in the applied rather than the pure; its approach to theory will typically derive from practical engagement with objects, operations and projects. The scope of study will be defined, though broadly, by the concerns actual or foreseen, of the working world. Students will learn to draw appropriately on a mixture of disciplines and their associated banks of accessible information to help them define and solve problems."*

10.3 *"To convince students of the worthwhileness of rigorous learning and mental challenge, education will need to be organised partly around the working world's actual ways of doing things. To appeal to more practical minds it will need to be grounded in actual tasks and job objectives of the relatively concrete here and now."*

10.4 Students, College lecturers and employers themselves will need to learn how to use the real–time context of working life as part of the raw material of learning. The student is to become someone who is not merely competent in carrying out a task but has the education and training to reflect systematically on what he/she is doing and so is able to create, or adapt to, change and innovation.

10.5 **The interactive College/employer dialogue needed in this second field is about the nature and value of work–related "applied" education. Work placements, "live" projects and so on are fundamental, not supplementary to it. How are more such "work–based" learning opportunities to be found? College/employer interaction is a necessary condition of "applied" education.**

10.6 IES reports that "work experience" is generally seen among College teachers as important and popular but nevertheless as an extra. Students enjoy it and believe it to be beneficial; lecturers work hard to find more places. But College managements seldom recognise its importance or allow staff the time or resources for coordinating it; there is little sustained discussion between Colleges and employers on the aims and methods of work experience or how to improve it. There is a shortage of places but few if any reports of local or regional efforts systematically to develop the workplace as a learning context or resource. If there are not enough work experience places, how can more be found? What possible substitutes might there be?

10.7 Experience may in future show that students can develop the full range of "core skills", to which employers constantly refer, *partly* through learning related to the working context. *"Quality criteria should be explicitly included"*, the Council has said about post–18 education in general, *"which have to do with communication, numeracy, data–appreciation, teamwork, tackling unfamiliar problems ..."*.

11. GUIDING STUDENTS

Guiding students towards education choices most likely to be of use to them and the economy.

11.1 *"At present"*, IES has told us, *"there is a strong temptation [to Colleges] to offer courses which are popular and increase their numbers and less interest in whether this is linked to a labour market requirement"*. Funding incentives and growth targets may encourage that but it implies that many students choose the "wrong" things to study through not understanding the likely demands of the working world they hope to enter. Moreover *"College staff are not often well–equipped to guide their choices"* the report goes on, *"since many [do] not know how to use the Labour Market Information [offered by the Training and Enterprise Councils]"*.

11.2 Most students want their College–based education to improve their prospects in working life. If their own choices are to govern what they learn, they must be helped to know in what directions within the working world their best prospects lie. The second government White Paper about competitiveness, "Forging Ahead", puts much emphasis on careers guidance. Good guidance implies the best available understanding on the one hand of employment prospects, short and longer–term, and, on the other, of the probable demands of work for more general capabilities: ability in communication, functional numeracy, team–working and so on.

11.3 In so far as students see their education as a preparation for working life, they need that education to give them *both* a broad grounding (on which to build continued training and learning to meet the changing demands of their work) *and* the chance to learn to do something *useful*, usually by acquiring readily marketable skills. Formal qualifications ought to attest a combination of breadth and skills. A student's choice of an occupational area for the broad grounding (eg for a GNVQ) ought to reflect an informed medium–term view, even if only in quite general terms, of the development of a local/regional/national economy. Sensible choice of a marketable skill, on the other hand, is a different matter and must imply an understanding of likely immediate "destinations".

11.4 Colleges can arrive at a longer view of the economy, mainly with the help of TECs (or groupings of several TECs). Students' need to choose immediately marketable skills on the other hand also

demands that Colleges collect and make better use of destination statistics.

11.5 **Interaction needed in this field, then, is between Colleges, using public and their own information, and local agencies for employers, often usually TECs. It is to be about the likely shape, changes and demands of the working world. The interactive dialogue here is about what information Colleges – and students – would find useful on the one hand and, on the other, the sort of information that can in practice be made available to them. Colleges can, however, learn much about the jobs open to their students by analyzing the work–destinations of previous groups.**

12. ACTIVE MARKETING

Helping Colleges to adopt a challenging, as against a merely responsive, marketing approach to identifying the needs of, and creating a demand from, the community they are part of.

12.1 To promote good learning is the Colleges' *raison d'etre*, whereas it is only one amongst many concerns – though a vital one – for employers, most employees and TECs. So the UK will look to the Colleges to take the initiative towards employers around the three central objectives we have discussed, namely expanding the market for, improving the relevance of and choosing the most useful directions for, work–related, "applied" education.

12.2 IES, however, reports that in these relatively early days after incorporation, *"Few Colleges were successful in actively generating business from new markets; most of them [say that they rely largely] on repeat business and existing contacts."* Members of staff with a marketing or industrial liaison function are *"not always at a senior level."* Those observations chime with findings of the FEFC Inspectorate's recent review of Colleges' "responsiveness", namely that most Colleges have a limited view of marketing as a matter largely of "selling" their existing "products". Most of them continue to see themselves as "responding" to employers' demands rather than as actively exploring their surrounding economy to create new demand.

12.3 The most thoughtful Colleges, though, are beginning to see their marketing in a radically different way: as a matter of developing sorts of demand (creating clients) that they as Colleges are well placed to serve in terms both of their education strengths and of their financial objectives.

12.4 We hope that such up–to–date marketing thinking will come to underpin and energise Colleges' strategic planning. It would depend on the assembling within Colleges of comprehensive data

on all their relations with the client and employer world and on an evaluation of them and their usefulness to the College's mission and its financial viability. That information would be the foundation for managing the whole spread of a College's interactions with its working environment, that is to say its potential client and employer base. (IES recommends such centralising of information so that staff can share it and employer relations be better managed).

12.5 **The "interaction" in question in this field is active marketing. It is between a College and the world from which its clients may come and where they may work. In the dialogue of "challenge inviting response" implied by such interaction a College's marketing efforts need to move closer to being "challenging" than being merely "responsive". The person in charge of College marketing needs to work near the top management level. Their work needs both to help the planning and management of individual departments and to inform the governing body's strategic thinking.**

12.6 Because the marketing task is to plan and direct a College's fruitful interaction with its environment (and, so to speak, to turn the world into its customer and its resource), it will effectively embrace the full range of employer–College interaction investigated by IES and discussed in this paper.

12.7 In the long run such marketing should pay for itself by attracting new clients. To get it started may well justify some additional investment. The challenges of independence and high expansion targets means that, as things stand, Colleges have little time or resources to spare.

13. TAKING THE DECISIONS

13.1 The Council believes that most Colleges will be able to play their critical education role and to give their first allegiance to their students, only by bringing together all their interaction with employers among their essential, central concerns.

13.2 For many that may mean learning to work as part of local (or "sub–regional") networks of organisations committed to the common cause of widening the spectrum of opportunities for individuals and employers.

13.3 The "interactive" mission for a College, as the Council sees it, is to take the initiative systematically in making available to as many clients as possible, not least the employed, education reflecting on, often growing out of, their actual or future potential working world. For Colleges to embrace that mission realistically decisions to be taken may need to include the following:

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13.4 **By Colleges:**

13.4.1 to make it their mission to extend the scope and develop methods of "applied" education;

13.4.2 to upgrade their marketing thinking and effort;

13.4.3 to "challenge" their community of potential clients and employers;

13.4.4 to manage all their relations with employers as part of a single College strategy;

13.4.5 to support their staff in exploring, researching and interacting personally with the working world which is to be the part–context for their teaching;

13.4.6 to find resources for the systematic development of work placements and other "real life" learning contexts; and

13.4.7 to discuss with TECs, and other agencies, how to develop their own understanding of future working opportunities – in particular the analysis of labour market information and student destinations.

13.5 **By employers:**

13.5.1 to be willing to consider helping employees to undertake College learning (perhaps on employers' premises);

13.5.2 to understand the fundamental role workplaces and their activities have to play as the context and material of "applied" education and so be willing to offer all the learning opportunities they can; and

13.5.3 to consider nationally and regionally how the properly growing demand for placements and live project work can be met.

13.6 **By TECs:**

13.6.1 to discuss Colleges' marketing thinking in terms of TECs' knowledge of local employment prospects, and the demands on employees the future working world is likely to make;

13.6.2 to help by acting as "brokers" between Colleges and companies; and

13.6.3 to separate this whole important strategic effort from the day–to–day complications of initiatives/schemes etc.

14. STEERING POLICY

14.1 Thoughtful Colleges have long been moving along the paths suggested here. Our conclusions reflect no more than what the research has shown a number of managers and governing bodies already to have in hand. Most Colleges, however, can be expected to redefine their purposes only if national policies and funding arrangements steer them that way and reinforce their decisions.

14.2 The means of such encouragement are to hand. Colleges are financed according to criteria which can embody incentives to reflect national priorities. Funds are offered to Colleges in the context of the strategic plans they draw up to national specifications and agree with TECs. The official funding–bodies control this machinery within a framework of guidance given by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. All those sources of influence are amply able to express the policy emphases we have proposed.

14.3 The merging of the Department of Employment with the Department for Education should do more than symbolise employer/education interaction. It provides the cue for refining the missions of the Training and Enterprise Councils. It should make it easier to consider whether the scheme–rules for government programmes – Youth Training and Training for Work for example – promote rather than hinder fruitful College/employer interaction. With those matters settled TECs will find it easier to contribute constructively to the Colleges' strategic–planning effort. All those concerned need to be of a common mind.

14.4 It will be for the Council with other employer organisations to work to spread understanding about the nature of "applied" education and its lifetime–learner clients. There is scope for a national investigation about how employers can increase the opportunities (via placements and projects of all sorts) for students to use the workplace as the raw material of their learning. Some willing employees already feel overburdened by demand for placements and discouraged by the costs of administering them properly. It will be timely to consider whether any incentives can be introduced or barriers removed to encourage more companies to join in.

Some other Council publications:

TOWARDS A PARTNERSHIP The Humanities for the Working World, (Spring 1990). Prepared by the Director.

BEYOND COMPUSLORY SCHOOLING A Numerical Picture, (December 1991). Professor Alan Smithers, Dr Pamela Robinson, School of Education, Manchester University.

INVESTING IN TALENT: The Use and Development of Science and Engineering Graduates, (December 1991). Andrea Spurling.

Investing in Diversity, (Summer 1992). Prepared by the Director.

CHANGING COLLEGES: Further Education in the Marketplace, (November 1993). Professor Alan Smithers and Dr Pamela Robinson, School of Education, Manchester University.

CHANGING COLLEGES: Further Education in the Marketplace. Executive Briefing, (November 1993). Professor Alan Smithers and Dr Pamela Robinson, School of Education, Manchester University.

A Wider Spectrum of Opportunities, (April 1995) Prepared by the Director.

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